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TAGS: IS KPAL PREL PTER COUNTERTERRORISM ISRAELI PALESTINIAN AFFAIRS
SUBJECT: (C) ISRAELI POLITICAL-MILITARY BRIEFING ON

FEBRUARY 25 TERRORIST ATTACK

Classified By: Ambassador Daniel C. Kurtzer for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Ambassadors from countries on the UN Security Council and of European Union were summoned to the Foreign Ministry February 28 for a political-military briefing on the February 25 terrorist attack in Tel Aviv that killed 5 Israelis and wounded more than 50. MFA Director General Ron Prosor and Director of Military Intelligence BG Yossi Kuperwasser briefed.

¶2. (C) Prosor said the terrorist attack revealed a number of major dilemmas for the Palestinian Authority, Israel and the international community. He said Israel supports Palestinian Authority efforts but not its strategy of co-optation which results in bringing into the PA elements bent on the PA's destruction. "Spoilers" both within and without Palestinian society are undermining the chances of President Mahmoud Abbas to succeed. While international support for the Palestinian Authority is positive, many international players appear willing to allow the PA to proceed without dismantling terrorist infrastructure. There is not enough pressure from the international community on Hizballah or on the state supporters of terrorism, in particularly Syria and Iran. Israel has undertaken a number of good-will measures -- such as releasing prisoners and stopping house demolitions -- but even this has not persuaded the PA to combat terrorism. Prosor said that time is of essence; the PA faces legislative elections on July 17, and Israeli evacuation of Gaza settlements will begin on July 22. He thus called on the international community to do its part in putting pressure on outside elements to stop terrorism and in persuading the PA to dismantle terrorist infrastructure.

¶3. (C) Kuperwasser said that, although the period of "tahidiya" or calm started on January 21, Palestinian Islamic Jihad and several other groups continued their preparations for terrorism. There were 13 PIJ attacks against Israelis before the Friday night suicide bombing in Tel Aviv. He said local PIJ commanders repeatedly asked for guidance from their leadership in Damascus on how to proceed. Understanding that the PA was taking no action to enforce the "tahidiya," the PIJ leadership communicated to its cadres that they needed to "keep working." Specifically, the most active PIJ cells, located in Jenin and Tulkarm, sought and received clearance to continue to operate as well as a promise of money. Kuperwasser said the Friday night terrorist attack had been in preparation since early February. The suicide belt was completed a week before the attack and the suicide video was prepared several days later. The PIJ cells in Tulkarm and Jenin informed the leadership of the attack immediately after it took place and were promised even more money, given the success registered in Tel Aviv. Kuperwasser said that there is another PIJ terrorist attack in preparation which appears to be focused on Israelis inside the occupied territories, given PIJ's belief that the Palestinian population would not support another attack inside Israel.

¶4. (C) Kuperwasser said the PIJ office in Damascus operates 24 hours a day, every day, despite Syrian denials. Four PIJ leaders operate out of Damascus, most notably, Ramadan Shalah, Ziad Nakaleh (who told Reuters that PIJ was responsible for the Friday night attack), and two other operational experts. The Damascus office provides money, establishes policy regarding attacks against Israel, delivers new technologies, and oversees training in bases within Syria.

¶5. (C) Kuperwasser described the explosives and the make up of the suicide belt from the Friday night attack as identical to those used in the October 2003 terrorist attack at the Maxim Restaurant in Haifa and the foiled attempt to attack a school in Yaqneam, both of which were PIJ terrorist attacks. Kuperwasser continued that Israel has also traced \$250,000 from Iran to PIJ operatives in the territories since the beginning of the year. The PIJ leadership remains in close contact with Syrian intelligence which never interferes in PIJ activities. Kuperwasser said Hizballah was not involved in the Friday night attack, but there are 50 Hizballah-funded cells in the West Bank and Gaza planning to carry out attacks.

¶6. (C) Kuperwasser concluded that the Palestinian Authority, although frustrated by the terrorist attack, has done little to deal with it, while trying to create the impression of

action. The PA has tried to assign responsibility for the attack to Hizballah, which is not the case. The PA statement of condemnation did not condemn terrorism but rather "the operation." The PA made some arrests but none of those arrested were from a list of 18 people passed to the PA by Israel as suspects in the terrorism. Finally, Al Quds newspaper continued the practice of hailing the "martyr" on the front page of its weekend edition.

17. (C) Comment: This briefing, clearly designed to stimulate diplomatic action at the United Nations, against Hizballah and vis-a-vis the PA, was somewhat more definitive on the PIJ headquarters connection than other briefings we received this weekend. Nonetheless, a relatively clear picture has been painted of on-going PIJ terror activities in the territories, stimulated and funded from PIJ headquarters in Damascus and at least tolerated by the Syrian government.

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KURTZER